

The bundle of medicine and the belt are burnt with the liver at the coming out. And whenever a child is born, every time, not only at the birth of the first or second, it is washed by the husband's mother with this same powdered medicine from the store in her pot. If this is not done they fear that perhaps the child will go mad or something dreadful will happen. They say of the powdered medicine: 'It is our kinship, it is our blood (*Se bakwa kama, se dipa jone*).⁷⁸¹ And if a girl runs off with a lover in the wild they mock her and say: 'Who has given you powdered medicine? You are no relative.' They say: 'She is not our relative, she has not got our blood. . . .⁷⁸⁴ The medicine is to create relationship (*shakama*). Using it means that the bride is now of my lineage (*shikole*).⁷⁸² You know that burial customs differ. When they have used the medicine they will bury my wives as they bury me, either sitting up or lying down, as the case may be. We Christians do not do this because we have another way. We take hands before the priest and say: 'This is my relative (*shakama jwanga*).'⁷⁷⁶

Another informant (a pagan), questioned separately, gave a similar interpretation. He said: 'Washing with the medicine means, "my wife has come. She is now my relative (*shakama jwanga*)."⁷⁸³

As already indicated, the act of washing with her husband proclaims the seniority of a wife. Washing with her own mother and her father or young brother, is to proclaim kinship. 'The girl washes with a brother to show that she has brothers and sisters. If she does not do so it shows that she is a poor person without relatives.' 'She has washed at her husband's place, then she comes home and her father honours her by looking for a boy, not an old one but a young one, to wash with her. Then the girl thinks: "I have fathers, I am no husband." But if she washed alone she would think: "Perhaps I am not their child, perhaps I have no relatives."⁷⁸⁵ Kwikile said: 'If she washes with me, her father, it means: "She is my child, I begot her myself, she is my first-born."⁷⁸⁶ Mwakimole, after discussing the circumstances under which a father washes, said: 'To wash is to admit that I have lived and borne a child and grown up.' 'And if a brother does it?' we asked. 'It means: "You young man, you are her father." If they ever quarrel the brother says: "Why do you not respect me, your father? We washed together in water."⁷⁸⁷ A young brother is chosen 'because the grown-up boys are going about. They want one who has not made love to girls.'

Standing in the doorway of her mother's hut (or of the woman acting in place of her mother if the latter is dead or divorced) is

CHAPTER V

THE RITUAL OF BIRTH¹

- 842 KVALA (or Lwembe) and the shades create desire in men and
women ~~and create conception; when the shades are angry women~~
do not conceive—this is one of the main tenets of pagan Nyakyusa
cosmology, and it is combined with a limited knowledge of phy-
siology. It is clearly understood that conception cannot take place
without intercourse, and that gestation in humans lasts for nine
months, but it is believed that repeated intercourse is necessary
[37] for conception, and formerly, if a man found his wife pregnant
after having lain with her only once, he accused her of adultery.

(a) *Taboo of procreation*

- [11] The procreation of children is an ultimate value of Nyakyusa
society and the accepted end of marriage, but it is regarded as
842 dangerous under certain conditions and is hedged about with
753 taboos. These are enforced so that both parents and children may
be healthy; a breach of them is thought to result in violent diar-
rhea, as well as monstrously swollen legs and weakness in men,
general debility in children, and miscarriage or an excessive men-
strual flow in women. The onus of observing them falls primarily
on women, though their husbands must also co-operate, and a
breach of taboo is treated as immoral, for it is believed to endanger
the life, or health, or property of others.

- [12] Certain general conceptions underlie the taboos. The first is that
of *asheshi*, filth, which is held to come from the sex fluids, men-
struation, and childbirth, as well as from a corpse, and the blood
of a slain enemy. All these are felt to be both disgusting and
dangerous, and the sex fluids are held to be particularly dangerous
to an infant, hence the taboo on husband and wife resuming inter-
course very soon after childbirth.

- 846 At first, when the child is very young, we think it very bad for the
parents to sleep together at all, because when the child is very young

¹ This account came from a score or more women not cited individually, as well as from our regular informants on ritual whose names are mentioned.

the women has constantly to handle it and if, just after intercourse, she has to do this without time to wash first, then the child, we think, will get diarrhoea or grow thin. Women always wash very carefully in the mornings after intercourse, both for the sake of the children and the husband. If the woman touches food unwashed after intercourse we think it will make her husband sick, and he will get unhealthily fat. If a child is old enough to play by itself . . . so that the wife can wash properly before attending to it, then it is all right for the couple to have intercourse, but not for the woman to become pregnant again yet. She should not do that until the child is weaned!¹

Contact with menstrual blood or a menstruating woman is held to be dangerous to a man, more particularly to a warrior, hence there is an absolute taboo on intercourse during menstruation (for five to eight days) and restrictions on cooking for a man. A menstruating woman does not blow up the fire on which her husband's food is cooking, or squeeze the food to test whether it is ready, or scrape ash off bananas or sweet potatoes she has roasted, or serve food, for 'her breath comes from her belly and it is dirty; her belly is dirty on account of the menstrual blood. All her body is dirty. She does not wash. When she washes, you, the husband, think that the flow has dried up and catch hold of her!' So a woman who is menstruating fans the fire instead of blowing it, and calls a co-wife or a child to serve the food she has cooked. She does not even crouch over the fire to warm herself, lest she contaminate it; and she neither uses the common calabash cup for drinking nor scoops water from the household water jar with her hand, but fashions a cup for herself from a leaf, or has her own little water-pot. She avoids passing behind or shaking hands with a man; she avoids a new-born infant; she keeps well away from cattle, neither passing behind them when they are in the homestead nor clearing out dung from the byre; she avoids touching medicines or entering the house of a doctor; and she avoids eating pumpkin or pumpkin leaves, or picking them. These taboos are enforced lest she injure men or infants or cattle or medicines, for 'she is dirty' and her 'dirt' is thought to cause purging and to rot medicines, and she,

¹ The 'fibi' is on the wife because she cleans her husband with her hands.

² Coitus interruptus is practiced until the mother is ready to conceive again. Formerly it was taboo to make a woman pregnant before her previous child was four or five years old. Her husband's dream made a great case about it. The child must know how to run before a younger brother was born. We said: "How can a woman carry two children?" Now she becomes pregnant again when the older is two. Of those who bear again before that it is said: "They kill the older child." (Statement of Ndagwa, an elderly man.)

844 behind the hut, moving inside after delivery, on to a litter of banana leaves spread for her. Her mother-in-law attends her and treats her and the new-born child with *shipili* medicine. She washes them in a basin made of two banana leaves, one sweet banana, one plantain, and is particularly careful to wash the infant's mouth and the mother's vagina. Powdered *shipili* is sprinkled in the water in the form of a cross. This is done 'that the mother and child should not have diarrhoea'. The cross is a symbol of overstepping (*lalaliloye lalo, lalaliloye lalo*, demonstrating a cross) and is made 'because heavy ones, those who are with their husbands on the bed, will come and overstep the mother and child if they are not treated'. Mother and child are also given a roasted banana with powdered *shipili* sprinkled on it. In bringing the *shipili* the husband's mother acknowledges the legitimacy of the child. 'If someone does not give a child *shipili* it is a bastard. It is as if the husband said: "Why do you insult your husband by committing adultery with others? Others have created this foetus; it is not mine!"'

The cord is tied with a shred of bark-cloth and then cut with a bamboo knife. 'An iron knife is taboo, it's a spear, other children will die from the spear disease (*alalwape*); to use a spear is like killing someone.' The after-birth is buried in the banana plantation with a piece of the cord sticking up, and later the litter is burnt at the same place. 'Only officiants (*alwape*) eat of these bananas growing over the burying place—no young person may do so for it's the banana grove of the litter.' The cord must be buried upright or 'the mother will not bear again'.

845 A delayed delivery is most commonly attributed to the woman's
775 adultery,¹ and she is pressed by the midwife to confess the name of her lover or lovers, but it is also believed that it may be due to *inside*, that is the shadow. The husband consults a diviner who indicates whether the *inside* is on his side or that of the woman's father and the one who is thus indicated should pray. 'Sometimes the woman herself tells of a quarrel which would lead to *inside* and then her husband or father goes to pray.'

• 846 Mother and child remain in confinement until the navel cord drops off, sheltered from 'heavy ones', who should not enter or even greet the mother from the doorway, and from men, to whom both mother and child are dangerous. 'Men must not see a tiny

[7] ¹ Unlike certain other Central African peoples, the Nyakyusa do not attribute difficulty in childbirth to the adultery of the husband.

child, the beauty of the body, the blackness, has not yet come. It's dirty (*tyadi*); even after it's come out it's dirty.' 'The confinement is not now feared by men, they just go in, because European times have come. There is no war now, but long ago they feared to enter, they feared to see the hair and the navel cord. They said: "We will get weary in the legs." ' When they went to war their legs became tied up.' During her seclusion the mother eats alone off leaves or out of special dishes, and even after she comes out of the hut she is careful not to eat with women who are 'heavy', or allow her dishes to be used by men. She has her own water-pot and calabash cup for several months.

To the Nyakyusa, the most dangerous point in the confinement is the loosening of the cord, and the baby is watched, day and night, to make sure that the cord does not fall between its mother's legs (*enaga*) for if that happens it is believed that the child will be sterile. As soon as the cord is safely off, mother and child are washed and shaved with *ilipiki* medicine 'to get rid of the filth', and anointed with ointment. They are given a millet porridge mixed with *ilipiki* which has been buried after dark at a cross-roads and left overnight. 'They say people will overstep the child. If they have not made porridge for him he will have diarrhoea.' The porridge is administered to the infant in the doorway of the hut. Then 'they throw out the rubbish (*ilish*)', the litter is burnt, the hut smeared, and mother and child 'come out'. In some families the husband kills a bull, especially to make a carrying skin for the baby, but whether he kills specially or not the baby is slung in a skin which conceals it from men.

Angonwike made it perfectly clear that the use of *ilipiki* in the ritual of birth has a double significance: it is to 'close up' the bowels of the child and the womb of the woman, and it is to acknowledge kinship between the mother and the new-born baby on the one hand, and the father's lineage on the other.

When a child is in the belly it is said that 'it's a person (*mushi*, i.e. a son-relative)'. When it is newly-born and has not yet eaten the *ilipiki* it is called *amushi*, which means that it is not yet our relative, we do not know it. The child is called *amushi* until the umbilical cord falls off and it eats the *ilipiki*, and comes out of the house. If an infant (*amushi*) dies in the house people do not mourn, they just say: 'The woman had a miscarriage.' They come to her and say: 'Have you recovered?' They do not say a child has died, and they don't say anything to relatives at a distance. As for the ritual, the mother undergoes a ritual alone, or with

846 her older child, only the two of them [i.e. the mother and the immediately preceding child]. Before a child has eaten the *itipiki* they make it
789 of no account, calling it *lanemelo*. . . .

When the child is born both mother and child are treated with *itipiki*, and powdered *itipiki* is sprinkled on the heap of leaves on which delivery took place. When it is a first child they wash the mother's breasts in the skin for carrying the baby, that is to put the child to the breast for the first time that they, (the breasts) may participate in kinship (*gaj gaj lakoma*). But for a second child they only wash off the dirt, they do not wash the breasts in the carrying skin, they say: 'We did it for the first child.'

Then they bring mother and child into the house (*bilabingye*). To a visitor they say: 'Friend, you are a month pregnant, do not come in. You are heavy.' And if a woman is eight months pregnant she also does not come in, she is heavy. If a heavy one comes and wishes to enter, the mother of the newly-born child refuses at the doorway; the heavy one takes earth from her footprint and rubs it on the child on the litter. She receives him on her lap and the others say: 'Thank you, you have met with him.' Then the pregnant one can speak to or about the child without fear, she has met it.

When the cord has fallen off they bury *itipiki* on the road; it remains overnight, and in the morning they dig it up and bring it and make millet porridge for the mother, not for the child. How can a tiny child eat? To the child they give powdered *itipiki* in a little water. The woman and child eat together—it is as we, in our ritual, eat together the blood of Jesus, the *itipiki* of the pagans is their blood. And when a child has eaten the *itipiki* they say it is their relative now, 'it has entered into our *itipiki* (*igile itipiki iyeto*)'. The mother when she eats the millet porridge closes herself up because much water and blood comes out of the womb. It is said heavy ones must not overstep her.

Then they shave the hair of the child. They anoint its head with *itipiki* and shave it—not the mother. If she chooses she also shaves, it is customary, but they don't anoint her with medicine. If she does not choose she does not shave. They sprinkle fine ash from the fire on the child's head.

789 The *itipiki* at puberty is one and the same, and at death, it is one and the same. If a woman had reached puberty and washed with a man, and then leaves him and comes to me, we do not give her *itipiki*, we say: 'Let her eat the *itipiki* of kinship in the birth ritual, when she has borne a child.'

Kasile made the same points about the function of *itipiki*:

789 Yes, the *itipiki* of the birth, puberty, and death rituals is one; that of
846 the twin ritual is different. When a child is born they spread a litter for

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him. They fear that if heavy ones come and speak, those who are pregnant, the child will suffer, it will become weak and exhausted on the litter, and will have constant diarrhoea. So they go to the cross-roads and mix millet flour and powdered *itipiki* with the feather of a chicken, they give the child some in his mouth to make the motions firm, and close the bowels. They do this¹ at the cross-roads that those who pass may step over it and take the disease away. That medicine closes the bowel, it saves the stomach and bowel when heavy ones come, those who are pregnant. If we do not treat it the child becomes exhausted with diarrhoea, though the mother is all right. 789 846 ●

It is taboo to give birth in the house, a woman bears a child outside on a pile of leaves; when she has borne the child they sprinkle powdered *itipiki* on those leaves, but if I, the father, am angry about the child I refuse the *itipiki*, saying: 'It's not my child, it's a bastard.' That is of old though. Now, in European times, they treat all children. Yes, now all are my children; formerly there were bastards. The *itipiki* is our blood; it is kept in the senior wife's house. 844 [77]

There was some disagreement on this point. Nsyani, an elderly man who was already married before Europeans came to the country, when asked: 'Do you perform rituals for bastards?' replied: 'Yes, they are born with² my cattle (*Bapapigwe manembe yungu*).' Four other men who discussed the matter together, agreed that— 848

When a woman has borne an illegitimate child we know that the child is the child of her husband because it was born with his cattle (*manembe yungu*). Whether the child is a boy or a girl, whether the genitor is known or unknown, and whether he has paid damages or not, the children belong to the woman's lord (*manu nitulu*). When an illegitimate child is born to an unmarried girl her fathers perform the ritual, for that 'man of the long grass' is like a bull. For an illegitimate child born to a married woman the rituals are performed by the husband, for the 'man of the long grass' is like a bull or a cock. Who is going to give a calf to a man alone, the bull who begot it?

But Lyandileko who, as a doctor and a grandmother, was intimately concerned in such matters, insisted:

If a woman has committed adultery and we do not know the man, we give her earth; it's just rubbish. If I give her medicine she and the child will die. If she has borne the child in the long grass and her father refuses to let her enter the house, non-relatives give it to her. If I, the mother, am there I give her this earth [touching the ground].

¹ The baby is not taken to the crossroads, only the *itipiki* and millet flour.

² Literally within.

Even after her return a wife may delay before cooking or drawing water again for her husband. Mwaisumo said: 846 ●

Some men do not let their wives cook for them until the child's body has gone black and it laughs. . . . This is mainly due to the mockery of friends, for some people refuse to come and eat with a man if the food is cooked by a woman who has recently borne a child, even though she has come out of confinement. They laugh at him and say: 'Why do you eat food prepared by a newly delivered woman? Have you no sense of disgust?' And her friends laugh at the woman, too, saying: 'Look you, the child has not yet grown at all!'

MWAMBUPUTA: Formerly a woman with a new-born child did not cook food. We said she was filthy. What food that she had overstepped would anyone eat? Until two months had passed she avoided cooking, then she cooked.¹ And she hid the child. Men should not see it for two months. It was taboo.

This is the full ritual performed for a first-born child and, some say, for the first-born of each sex. For others there is no sending a fowl to the girl's parents, or bringing her back with gifts, and it does not matter where the child is born; but still the seclusion of mother and infant, treatment with *ikipiki* medicine brought by the husband's mother, and shaving are felt to be important. 851

We did not find any significant differences between the rituals of birth in Selya and in Kukwe, but there is one rite peculiar to the Lugulu people and regarded by other Nyakyusa with somewhat shocked amusement, which is interesting because it expresses, in crude terms, a conflict between the groom and the bride's family repeatedly suggested in the ritual of Selya and Kukwe, but never openly acknowledged. We did not see this rite ourselves, but quote the account of Kakune, the doctor, whose mother was Lugulu. Though himself a Kukwe, he speaks in the first person as if he were Lugulu—a dramatic device common enough in Nyakyusa. 84

KAKUNE: When my daughter goes to her husband, and first becomes pregnant, they tell us: 'She is pregnant.' And we say: 'Oh, she is pregnant? She is pregnant! War has come!' When she has borne her child, the go-between in the marriage representing the husband comes to her parents with a hen to tell them. Then later they send the go-between a message, saying: 'Come'. Meanwhile they have prepared huge quantities of food: porridge, and curds, and beer. And then the girl's husband calls his friends of the age-village (he does not call his relatives, but his 84-3 851

¹ A monogamist eats with his friends in the age-village, or is provided for by his mother, like a bachelor.

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845 and the statement cannot be altogether devoid of
783 truth. The influence of the mind upon the body is
universally admitted: may it not be that the con-
sciousness of guilt has the effect of contracting the
muscles, and the relaxation which follows confession
renders birth less painful? And may it not be that
even a false confession, wrung from a despairing
sufferer, brings a momentary relief sufficient to bring
the child to the birth? One is glad to add, however,
that many women have the courage to refuse altogether
to submit to this shameful ordeal, insisting that their
trouble is due, not to the wrath of the spirits, but to
other causes, and that they will die rather than confess
what is not true.

844 When birth has taken place, the cord is cut with a
bamboo knife, and the placenta buried in the family
● 846 place of prayer, a small part protruding to leave a con-
nection which insures further children. All this time
no one in the house may swallow saliva. The father
calls out to know the sex of the child, but he must not
yet enter (for the party have entered the house as
soon as possible after the birth). After a few days
the mother is anointed with oil and shaved, along with
her child, and powdered with medicine. Meantime
intimation has been sent to the grandparents; a cock
if a boy, a hen if a girl, telling them all that they wish
to know. The mother may now resume her household
duties.

851 But in about a week she goes to show the child to
603 her own parents, and at the end of her visit, which
431 lasts some weeks, great preparations are made by both

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sets of grandparents. The mother sets out from her father's house with a train of friends carrying food, and a very special friend who carries the baby. Arrived at the paternal grandfather's, the food is laid down, and the child is taken by the grandfather, who presents a hoe to the maternal grandmother; and then, with the child in his arms, goes to the *ikiyinja* (the family place of prayer). He spits into the palm of his hand, and, laying it in blessing upon the child's head, he prays:

"May it be well with you, my child. Ye spirits, be not surprised at this child of yours whom I present to you. I am old: let him take my place. Care for him in this world of sickness. I was alone, and ye have multiplied me and made me a company. Be not angry, but bless the child; and in the sight of God let him be acceptable."

The mother sits with head covered, for she must not be seen by her father-in-law. The parties now exchange gifts of food, and eat separately, after which the grandfather gives the child a gift, usually now a small coin, over which the little hand is closed. Next, the grandmother takes the infant and hands it to its mother, who, with a pot of beer on her head, goes off with her husband to their home. Arrived there, but not till then, the father takes the child in his arms, and thanks it for the gift it has brought, a foretoken of more yet to be earned.

Lingering here and there in certain families are strange customs, probably belated survivals from

46

Konde Children

● 846 earlier days. The family of Lugulu at Mwakeleli wear blinders of leaves for weeks after a birth. At the end of the period a feast of beer and ill-cooked food is prepared, and both sets of families spend the night in open reviling of each other, and ceaseless tramping of the feet the livelong night. In the morning good food is eaten, and both parties go their ways with mutual good will. This is called *ukutula indila*, to fear the fears; to endure the terrors. No explanation of what the terrors are has reached me.

845
783 The birth of twins is regarded as one of the greatest of misfortunes, and is followed by ceremonies intended to cleanse the parents from the stain which has come upon them, and to prevent its spread to others. A hut is built outside the village, with a partition in the middle, on either side of which the parents live, but they must speak to each other only in whispers, and to others not at all. The doctor sprinkles all the relatives with medicine, and kindles a fire, in the smoke of which every one must stand for a moment. The parents are shut up in the hut, but may leave it for a few moments at night, and no one may see them. After about a month the doctor comes again, with beating drums and shaking rattle, and brings the parents out of their house of restraint. A second sprinkling of medicine upon each relative being made, the doctor takes a bunch of grass from the roof, kindles it, and hands it to the father, who, holding it in one hand, crawls out of the house, and runs, followed by the crowd. He returns, however, and receives their

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memories and yarns, eats food made from the flour of a pumpkin, which destroys the virtues of his hunting medicines, and at the same time takes away all probability of his death being the prolonged weariness it would otherwise be. 755-

Fishing nets are drugged to ensure a good catch; but here again caution must be exercised, for a very great catch is an omen of a very large family, which is not always an ambition held by the Konde people. 789 226 787

The mother who has just given birth to a child must not cook food, nor may she warm herself at the common fire; a small fire is kindled for her at which she sits by herself; and when the child goes out of the house for the first time a medicine is put into its mouth to guard it against the ills of the world into which it has come. 846 789

Christians do none of these things; but Christians are not as other people. They have passed away from the fear of spirits and from the dread of a world in which anything may happen at any moment; and the fact that they escape the consequences of failure to follow custom is having its effect on the common people, many of whom are cautiously experimenting to see whether they too may live a freer and more unshadowed life; but the belief in the protective powers of such things as I have been describing dies hard. 789 771